

Letter from Taizé

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Letter from Russia

in this year of Russian Christians' millenium celebrations¹.

IN THE CHURCHES OF RUSSIA, the common prayer, the profundity of the choral singing, the icons, the flickering candlelight, the incense, everything helps us to discern "heaven's joy on earth". Our being is seized in its entirety down to the very depths, not only the mind but the body as well. Icons are like windows opening on to the realities of the kingdom of God; they make these realities part of our prayer on this earth. They give us a glimpse of human beings who are already risen, transfigured.

The secret of the soul of Russian Christians lies especially in a longing for the resurrection. And, by his presence in each person, the Risen Christ accomplishes, through his Holy Spirit, a gradual transfiguration of human beings. From it, Russian Christians have drawn, throughout their history, a whole inner life and energies of loving enabling them to pass through times of peace as well as times of the harshest trials. By their confidence in the resurrection, they strengthen us in the essential of the essential of the faith.

2 When we see so many young faces at Taizé, our desire is for them to discover meaning for their life. The main thing, then, is that they be listened to with discernment as well as with trust. Discernment and trust are inseparable; they reinforce one another. Listening to them with disinterest is a kind of pedagogy so that, by an inner birth, they can discover their gifts and allow them to develop.

At the end of November, Patriarch Pimen of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, sent the following telegram to Taizé: "We accept with gratitude the gift of New Testaments which you proposed on the occasion of the millenium celebrations of the Russian Orthodox Church." In June, Brother Roger was invited to attend the One Thousand Years celebrations and he proposed to search for possibilities of having one million New Testaments printed in Russian.

Brother Roger was invited by the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church to take part in the thousand year anniversary celebrations of the baptism of Rus', held from 4-7 June 1988, in Moscow, Zagorsk and Yaroslavl, as well as in Kiev in the Ukraine. (Rus' is the ancient name for what is today the Ukraine, Russia and Byelorussia.) □

Translated into thirty languages, the LETTER FROM RUSSIA was written to be read and reflected upon at TAIZÉ during the FORTY WEEKS OF INTER-CONTINENTAL MEETINGS that, from 4 February to 12 November 1989, will bring together young adults from thirty-five to sixty different countries at a time.

□ This LETTER was made public during the meetings in MADRAS (27-31 December 1988) and PARIS (30 December 1988 - 4 January 1989). In Paris, of the 33,000 participants, 8,500 came from Eastern Europe.

Beauty ancient and ever new": by the gift of their lives, multitudes of women and men, among all peoples of the earth, witness to the fact that human beings have not been created for hopelessness.

When failure, trials and discouragements weigh heavily on your shoulders, how can you always remember one of the realities most essential for your entire lifetime? This reality comes to life within the human person. It bears the name of peace of heart.

This peace in the depths reawakens a communion that may have fallen asleep. Sheer wonder rises up. And un-hoped for joys come alive, along with a simplicity of life, a poetic impulse and, for those able to grasp it, a mystical vision of the human being.

With your heart at peace, your worries about yourself fade into thin air and you become able to discover how deeply you can find fulfilment by giving your life. In that way, you receive a kind of shock of meaning that is brand-new every time.² ▷

AN APPEAL: ONE MILLION NEW TESTAMENTS FOR RUSSIA

Everyone's contribution is welcome.

One million copies of the New Testament will therefore be printed, in paperback, in the Russian Millenium Version. Each copy costs 25p. GB or 30p. IRL or 45 cents US or 50 cents CDN. These New Testaments will be distributed free of charge to Russian Christians and will be sent to Moscow from February 1989 onwards.

Gifts can be sent to the following addresses:
UK: "Operation Hope", Bank Account no. 44495090, Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, LONDON WC2R 0QS. • USA: "Operation Hope", c/o Taizé, 413 W. 48th Street, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036. • IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, etc.: gifts can be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope".

You ask yourself, but where is the living spring from which such vitality can be drawn?

It is found in the mysterious presence of a love.

If you knew that God always comes to you... What matters most for you is discovering that God loves you.³ That is the living spring.⁴ God's love is a presence; it is forgiveness.

Peace of heart is possible, and even certain, because God's forgiveness radiates confidence.

God loves you even if you think that you do not love God. And there will come a day when you will say to God: I love you, perhaps not as I would like to, but I do love you.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, a luminous Gospel insight which had been hidden for a long time under the dust of the ages has been brought to light: for every human being, even if they are not aware of it, the risen Christ is there.⁵

In the wonder of a communion, he makes his home in the very depths of your soul: he goes down to the lowest depths of your being.⁶ His presence is as clear as your own existence.

Could you have doubts about this? You are not unfaithful for all that. Doubt may simply be the other side of faith.⁷ And, in your nights, thirst for his presence causes a flame to spring up, an inner light.

LORD CHRIST, in us there are wounds, to be sure, but there is above all the miracle of your mysterious presence. In this way, unburdened or even liberated, we walk forward with you, Christ, and we rest upon your words: "I give you my peace; do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."⁸

By his Holy Spirit, the risen Christ penetrates, in order to transfigure it, even what is most disconcerting in you. He reaches what was out of reach. All forms of pessimism that you harbour about yourself melt away. Away with those somber impressions that your imagination can produce! And a peace of heart shines out.

Sing my soul: I belong to Christ, I belong to Christ.⁹ An imperceptible inner transformation, the transfiguration of your being continues your whole life long. It allows you

3 Before his death, Dostoyevsky called his children to him and said to them, "Have absolute trust in God and never despair of his forgiveness. I love you but my love is nothing beside the immense love of God for human beings, his creatures." Then he embraced them and gave them his blessing.

4 God loves us as God loves Christ. In a prayer Jesus said, "You have loved them as you love me" (John 17,23). Baptized in Christ, "we have passed on Christ" (Gal 3,27) and to each of us God speaks these words that Jesus heard at his baptism: "You are my beloved son; in you I find my joy" (Matt 1,11). A whole mystical tradition expresses this conviction: God loves me in the only begotten son; God loves me like his only son, with no difference at all.

5 "The son of God has, in a certain way, united himself with each human being... And this holds true not only for those who believe in Christ... The Holy Spirit offers to all, in a way known to God, the possibility of being made partners in the paschal mystery." (Gaudium et Spes 22,2. 1965)

6 In this irreplaceable communion, "prayer without ceasing" (1 Thess 5,17) does not necessarily mean using words. Prayer is an incredible vast reality. Words are only a tiny part of it. It is also made up of thoughts, images, recollections, emotions. When we are working or resting, it continues within us. At times, of course, many words are needed to express everything to God. But if we want to spell everything out at all costs, do we sometimes run the risk of disturbing a communion with God? Without forcing the lips, prayer finds other expressions - humble gestures, symbols: the sign of the cross, the gesture of offering one's forehead by placing one's forehead on the ground. There comes a moment when prayer becomes simply resting our heart in God in silence. This silence may be devoid of any images and thoughts; it is also filled with the feeling of the presence of the risen Christ, of his Holy Spirit.

7 Faith, trust in God, is an utterly simple reality so simple that all can receive it. If it required great intelligence to be understood, it would be the exclusive possession of a privileged few. Nobody can understand the whole of faith all by themselves (cf. 1 Cor 13,12). Each of us understands a greater or lesser part. That implies that each of us is supported by the trust of all the witnesses to Christ, from Mary to the apostles down to the present day, in that mystery of communion which is the Church, the "Christ of communion". This means that each person has to dispose themselves inwardly, day after day, to place their trust in the Mystery of Christ. When the apostle Paul speaks of the Mystery of Faith, he uses the expression to refer to Christ who is believed in and loved within the Church (1 Tim 3,9. 15-16).

8 John 14, 27.

9 To pray, some Russian Christians murmur the rhythm of their breathing, the prayer of the Name of Jesus. They do this silently or aloud, all their whole life long. Simple prayers, sometimes a single word, are able to penetrate the very depths of the being. Each morning upon awakening, we can recall these words: "I belong to Christ" or "I belong to Christ" or else: "Jesus our peace, peace to my heart"

O God, who is our future and who waits for us in an everlasting joy, never ceases to come to meet us. He becomes our present and gives meaning to this present.

Too often, human beings flee the present moment and focus on the future or the past. When thinking of the past, our memory too often clings to bitter events, forgetting the joys that existed. And though, in the future, there is a fine human hope, our mind concentrates on fears of trials to come. When our heart is full of trust, we are able to understand that the past is hidden in God's forgiveness, in the forgiveness that we offer to one another, and that God has already taken care of the future.

11 Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) wrote: "When we glimpse God in what He gives us in the present moment, we receive a foretaste of the joy to come." This Russian mystic was so steeped in the reality of the resurrection that he welcomed pilgrims with these words: "My joy! Christ is risen!"

12 "One conviction is part of the most ancient teaching and practice of the Church: the conviction that she is required by vocation (herself, her ministers and each of her members) to alleviate the misery of those who suffer, nearby or far away. And to do this not only with the 'superfluous' but also with the 'necessary'. Superfluous ornamentation of churches and precious objects of worship cannot take precedence over sharing in cases of need. It could even be obligatory to get rid of these things in order to give bread, drink, clothing and shelter to those who are deprived of them." (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1988)

13 See, in this respect, on page 5, the two recent meetings, one with the Secretary General of the UN, Javier Perez de Cuellar, in Geneva on 5 July, and the other at UNESCO on 21 September, with the Director General Frederico Mayor and the ministers of education of Eastern and Western Europe.

14 Sirach 30,22

15 Matt 5,1-12

16 Some witnesses to Christ help us to live out this spirit of the Beatitudes. Thirty years ago, Pope John XXIII began his ministry. In the simplicity of his heart, that man knew how to rejoice in what God was accomplishing through him. He viewed others and himself with a look of peace that built up the inner self. He was the man of the first beatitude. In the 1970s, inexplicable upheavals modified something in the outlook of many Christians. Today it seems that some of them have still not completely recovered. So many intransigent judgements were levelled at that communion which is the Church. Traces of fear have remained, as if it were somehow wrong to rejoice in what God is accomplishing through the faith of others or through one's own. The spontaneities of faith have been affected by this. In extreme cases this has brought about in some people a denigration of themselves, a loss of self-esteem. They no longer believe in the value of their life.

to live in the present moment; it makes each day God's own today.¹⁰ It is, already on this earth, the beginning of the resurrection, the dawning of a life that has no end.¹¹

Did you think that, in you, the sands of the desert had covered over God's love? Inner deserts are there. But is it necessary to linger in them? In dry ground an almond tree can blossom... And perhaps there are fewer deserts than we think...

In both hemispheres, one question that preoccupies a whole young humanity is making the earth a place fit to live in for all.¹²

In order to take part in this task, then, are you aware of all your inner resources? In a pilgrimage of trust on earth, inner life and human solidarities are never in opposition to one another.

Who could keep their eyes shut in the face of all that assails the abused, the poor of the earth? And, where creation is wounded, who could remain indifferent?¹³

JESUS, RISEN LORD, you sometimes see me disoriented, like a stranger on this earth. But a yearning fills my soul – the longing for your presence. And my heart remains restless until it entrusts to you, Christ, all that was weighing it down and keeping it locked up in isolation far from you, Jesus, my joy, my hope, my life.

From peace of heart spring forth, in utter spontaneity, little joys, moments of happiness beyond our hopes.

"Gladness of heart is the very life of humanity"¹⁴; long before the coming of Christ, a believer had already discovered this. And at the beginning of the Gospel, do we not find the "happy" of the Beatitudes?¹⁵

Dare to rejoice in fullness at what God is accomplishing in and around you.¹⁶

Are you troubled by some situation? Has someone discredited and humiliated you? Right away, without waiting, find peace of heart by entrusting to God what has disconcerted, or even wounded you. Foundering in worry has never been a way of the Gospel. ➤

The peace of your heart makes life beautiful for those around you.

And when a community, small or great, becomes an abyss of kindness, then it makes the Gospel credible for certain.

Might you be undergoing the great trial, that of a break in affections, or again, could your purest intentions have been distorted? Listen as Jesus proclaims the most astonishing of the Beatitudes: "Happy are you when people speak falsely all kinds of evil against you on my account."¹⁷

For every person, Christ wishes a joy, a Gospel happiness...and he is always with whoever consents to give themselves to the utmost.

ONE DAY, IN ASIA, I saw a leper raise his arms and what remained of his hands and begin to sing these words: God has not inflicted a punishment on me; I sing his praise because my disease has turned into a visit from God. In his misfortune, he had realized that suffering does not come from God. God is not the author of evil nor a tormentor of the human conscience. And God never looks on passively at our distress. God suffers along with each person. Yes, there is a pain that God suffers, that Christ suffers.¹⁸

Let your heart sing out! The spirit of praise¹⁹ comes to life when the simple beauty of a common prayer transmits "heaven's joy on earth."²⁰ There you discern communion in the Body of Christ, his Church, in the steps of Mary, the apostles and all who are seeking Jesus, the risen Lord.²¹ And peace of heart is restored to you, even in the midst of the most disconcerting situations.

God never places us in the time of fear, but in the time of trust.²² The Gospel does not regard human beings with pessimism. Happy all who discover, in the risen Christ, a peace of heart that will never pass away, that will never wear out, an unexpected joy.

Never forget that, although in all of us there are wounds, there is above all the miracle of the mysterious presence of a Love. "*Beauty ancient and ever new... your peace has set me on fire.*"²³

17 Matt 5,12

18 GOD SUFFERS WITH innocent people who are experiencing incomprehensible trials. God is suffering with the people of ARMENIA. God is never the author of catastrophes. One day, the prophet Elijah went off to the desert to listen to God. (1 K 19) A hurricane broke forth, followed by an earthquake, then a violent fire. But Elijah understood that God was not in these outbursts of nature. And so, for perhaps the first time in history, such a clear intuition was written down: God does not impose himself through violence, he does not express himself through powerful means that frighten people. Today like yesterday, God is not the author of war, of earthquakes, of misfortunes. God wants neither suffering nor human distress.

19 "Praised be the Lord, and I am delivered from the adversary" (Ps 18). The spirit of praise is offered to help us advance. When we express our thanks to Christ for what he is accomplishing through us and through others, the "adversary" retreats. Who is this "adversary"? He has different names: harshness, hopelessness and that pessimism which often lends an appearance of authority to those who profess it.

20 In a technological civilization where efficiency is a priority (and it can often be a good thing), many feel themselves to be trapped in the anonymous rhythms of programs and timetables. They find themselves thirsting for the one thing that really matters, for signs of the invisible. If a church building seems to them to have the look of a purely functional edifice and if, in addition, the worship strikes them as monotonous, and sometimes mechanical, some of them become bored. And this boredom is spiritual suffering. Common prayer, the liturgy, is meant to allow us to glimpse something of the realities of the kingdom of God. In this respect, Russian Christians can be of incomparable assistance.

21 Trust in the resurrection enables us to grasp that the communion which unites all believers, the "communion of saints", does not end with death. In simplicity of heart, we can say to those who have gone before us and who are near to God: pray for me, pray with me. Their prayers counted in our life. At the moment of their death how could we cease to trust in their prayers?

22 If human beings are burdened, or even threatened, by the enormous weight of fears, that comes from human situations, never from God.

23 Saint Augustine, Confessions, X, XXVII.

NEWS FROM MADRAS

After the first Madras Meeting (1985), cooperation between young Indians and Europeans has made it possible to build a small school in a poor neighbourhood of the city. In such a shanty town this was the first priority. Education will make other things possible, including the building of dwellings for all. More about this will be in the next "Letter from Taizé".

1989

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FORTY INTERCONTINENTAL MEETINGS

from February 4th to November 12th

IN TAIZÉ, from February 4th to November 12th 1989, 40 weeklong intercontinental meetings will bring together at the same time young people from between 35 and 60 nations. Together they will go deeply into the inner life and human solidarity. ■ The mornings will be given over to the wellsprings of faith, seeking God. In the afternoons, young people from Asia, Africa and Latin America will welcome the others. They make it possible to discover that even in the most troubled areas of the world, young Christians pray and commit their lives as witnesses of trust. Everyone together seeks how to continue living at home what they have discovered. In very simple ways, it is possible to open up paths of reconciliation in one's town, village, neighbourhood and local Christian community and to make of one's own life a "pilgrimage of trust." ■ From now on, the young people from the southern continents are more numerous in Taizé and they stay for a longer time. Their presence is made possible in the measure that parishes in Europe contribute towards their travel expenses. After a time of preparation in Taizé, they travel to the local Christian communities in Europe, accompanied by young Europeans. For many years, the Gospel was conveyed above all from the northern continents. Coming from countries where the faith is often more alive, these young people are participating in a new evangelisation of Europe, in the arrival of a springtime of the Church.

EUROPEAN MEETING EAST-WEST OF YOUNG PEOPLE
PECS, April 28th - May 1st 1989

IN HUNGARY

For the first time an East-West European Meeting of young people will take place in Hungary. It will be in Pecs, in the south of the country, from Saturday April 29th to Monday May 1st (it is possible to arrive on the evening of Friday 28th). Young people will be welcomed in the local Christian communities and will gather together for prayers in the churches of the town.

If you wish to take part, please do not delay in writing to Taizé for information. □

A TELEGRAM FROM POPE JOHN PAUL II.

The Holy Father, remembering with thankfulness the previous initiatives of the young people of Taizé at Rome, is overjoyed to know that they will gather together again in Madras and Paris. He encourages them to persevere in prayer, in union with parishes and movements and to preserve in the courage to live with the poor and all those who seek the reconciliation of Christians and peace between all peoples, in order to make their lives, following in the steps of Christ, a gift for others. Blessing them with all his heart, he prays the Holy Spirit to inspire in them this generous love. ■

A meeting at UNESCO

(...) In these closing years of the 20th century, many young people have been marked by break-ups of every kind, break-ups between the generations, by being abandoned, through families falling apart. Sometimes their hearts are dying away from solitude. Some reach the point that they lose the taste for living. Their capacities wear out in boredom, in a constant feeling of "What's the use?" And little by little, passivity can take over some of them.

If it is true that some are frozen to the bone by disillusionment, what is truer still is the fact that throughout the world there are inventive young people, creators. At Taizé, we are the astonished witnesses: these young people are capable of awakening to the meaning of life those who had given way to scepticism and discouragement. (...)

Making the earth fit for habitation! That is what enthalls a great number of young people. An entire young humanity in both hemispheres is aspiring to heal the breach between North and South, between East and West. Certain young people, be they believers or non-believers, are taking risks in order to be a leaven of trust at the heart of these separations. They dare to rise up amidst humanity like signs of something un hoped for. And the last thing that they would want to support would be untouchable egotisms, be they of a particular race or nation.

Making the earth fit for habitation! These young people know very well that one of the conditions for peace will always be a more just distribution of the earth's wealth. An unjust distribution of goods is a wound done to the human community, it is a source of conflicts and wars. These young people know too that material sharing of the goods of the earth is not everything. Peace also implies among other things a sharing of cultures. We have discovered this on our hill of Taizé, where the meetings every week, which were once very European, have become intercontinental.

There are multitudes of young people who are longing to make the earth fit for habitation, not only for a few peoples, but for all. And so they wish that an equal trust be shown towards all the peoples of the earth. How for example, to accept summary judgements that humiliate an entire people of whom only a small handful of leaders unleashed the setting in motion of violence or a war. There are no peoples more culpable than others.

In view of trust between all human beings, I would like to recall an intuition of the man whom perhaps I have most venerated on this earth and who understood us so well, Pope John XXIII. Shortly before his death, during a final conversation, he marked our lives. John XXIII had just written "Pacem in Terris", where he called for the creation of a world authority, to sustain a peace between all.

On September 21st 1988, in the presence of the Education Ministers of Eastern and Western Europe, meeting together in Paris, the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Federico Mayor, handed over the 1988 UNESCO Peace Education Prize to Brother Roger. This prize, whose aim is to highlight actions leading to the "establishment of peace in the spirit of humanity," was awarded to Brother Roger by a unanimous decision of UNESCO's international jury, in recognition of his activities "in favour of peace, reconciliation and trust between human beings, particularly young people of every continent". Brother Roger announced that the sum which goes with this prize will be used for young people and children who are in need. Here are some extracts of Brother Roger's address on that occasion:

Will this intuition be gone into thoroughly, without delay, by the great international organisations? (...)

In the harshest periods of human history, very often a small number of women and men across the world, have been able to reverse the course of certain historical evolutions. To be of their number, the experience of a whole lifetime is not necessary. Today, in every nation of the earth, there are young people who give so much of themselves to transfigure the determinisms of hate, violence, and war. Often these young people are an invisible leaven of peace. They are already bringing healing where the human family is rent asunder. Their trust is kindling a fine human hope on the earth. And so, from now onwards, they making it possible to understand that we are no longer in a time of fear but in a time of trust. □

Youth suggestions for the UN

To remain in a dynamic of trust, and so that their energies are not scattered in a host of short-lived initiatives, it is essential that these young people find a way to focus their searching and to commit their abilities in already existing realities.

Through the UN, for the first time in world history, a universal organisation exists. The start of a worldwide political arena, the UN is an irreplaceable meeting-place for the governments of almost every nation. What then are the concrete possibilities that the UN can offer to begin to respond to four basic desires of the younger generations?

PEACE

It would be essential for the UN Security Council to be made able to create a permanent peace. The Security Council is a watchdog council able to meet at short notice, day or night, to prevent a war from starting. How can it be given more authority and be led to act still more effectively? The right of veto should not be invoked to keep the Security Council from discussing the purpose of preventing a conflict.

The question of worldwide disarmament is so complex that many fall prey to scepticism. And yet, in spite of contradictions, the process has begun on different levels. For example, the constitution of Costa Rica bans any army. The UN, by offering guarantees of security, could invite nations to disarm without waiting any longer.

The UN could ask that a certain percentage of young people be authorised to fulfill a civil service in the framework of its activities, for example in refugee camps.

A TELEGRAM FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Dear Brother Roger,

At the end of a particularly encouraging year for all those who, like you, desire peace and understanding, and at the moment when many thousands of young people are getting ready to unite their prayers in Madras and Paris, I would like to send you my warmest wishes for the success of these two large international meetings.

As I had the joy of saying to you this summer during our meeting in Geneva, the efforts of all these young people to try to make the earth fit for habitation and for all mankind to live in solidarity, encourage us greatly at the United Nations.

May they be thanked for their prayers and for their commitment, inspired year after year by the peace educator that UNESCO well recognised in you.

Javier Perez de Cuellar,
Secretary-General
of the United Nations.

SHARING

To respond to the call for sharing that rises up from the conscience of the younger generations, it would be important for the UN to awaken powerful solidarities in the human family. The objective: for each person on the earth to have a place to live, employment, nourishment and the possibility of health care.

So that it can effectively foster solidarity between rich and poor countries, it is necessary for the UN to be given means to control international trade. To eliminate speculation and outrageous profits, could not the UN set up an economic watchdog council? This council would guarantee, among other things, means of exchange and interest rates, as well as the basic prices of raw materials. This economic watchdog council would ensure that a code of international trade be respected, so that the consequences for the poorer nations would be taken into account in all markets.

The technical agencies of the UN perform regular and effective work. The UN could identify new areas in which it is possible to come to an agreement and propose projects for common undertakings.

Another area of cooperation: the protection and use of the "common patrimony of humanity": the South Pole region, the oceans, outer space, etc. These areas will soon be exploited commercially. The UN should be able to ensure that this is never for the exclusive benefit of the more developed countries.

On July 5th 1988, Brother Roger, accompanied by children from every continent, was received in Geneva by Mr. Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations. Brother Roger expressed to him the hopes of young people as they emerge from the intercontinental meetings held in Taizé.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Many young people are hoping for the UN to work towards an integral liberation of every human being. Many are aware that "underdevelopment is not only economic; it is also cultural, political and simply human."

In a society in which the mass media play an ever greater role, and given the risks of manipulation, it is important that the UN furnish a regular and independent source of information. Satellites could be the means of worldwide diffusion of news.

Over the past fifteen years, the UN has considerably developed juridical and international instruments to protect human rights. Many people find a cause for rejoicing in the recent ratification of the United Nations convention against torture. The UN could transform the commission on human rights into a World Court for Human Rights which has the authority to receive suits and to take legal action on behalf of individuals against their government's abuse of their trust.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Who could remain indifferent faced with the rapid deterioration of the natural environment which had stayed unchanged throughout the whole of human history? The increase in natural disasters caused by human activity and the demographic pressure on resources which are already limited make the environment an inescapable problem.

The problem of the environment cannot be separated from the problem of development. In order to provoke an awareness and take initiatives which are not founded upon anxiety, it is primarily important to provide full and scientific news information.

The UN could create an environmental observatory with antennae on every continent. This would permit an unbroken supervision and a definition of the limits of exploitation of natural resources, animals or plants, as well as regulations for the checking of industrial pollution.

Like the creation of the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the UN should create an International Air Agency and an International Water Agency. These organisms would pay particular attention to the threat of climatic changes caused by human activities. □

Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to God. Christ's whole life is prefigured in this passage: it is in Jerusalem that he will be contradicted, condemned and killed; it is there that he will offer his life; from there the light of the Risen Christ will shine out, through the community of the first believers, to the very ends of the earth.

Simeon and Anne are able to discern God's coming in a humble event, as were the shepherds on Christmas night. Simeon recognises Christ because Simeon bears within himself all the expectation of his people which has been formed during a long history marked by painful events.

The fulfilment of the hope which only a few prophets held has come: in Jesus, God has come for all nations, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles". One reason for Christ being rejected is that he was announcing God's love for all people. God's fulfilment exceeds preconceived human expectations.

What can help us to leave aside all preconceptions as we await God's coming in our life? Can prayer show us how to recognise the signs of God's presence in our life?

Letter from Taizé

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These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Wed Heb 7.1-3
Lk 10.38-42
Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.
Jr 17.14-17

2 Thu Jr 18.1-6
Lk 11.1-4
Jesus' power to save those who come to God through him is absolute, because he lives for ever to intercede for them. Heb 7.22-25

3 Fri Jr 18.18-20a
Heb 7.26-27
Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. **Lk 11.5-13**

4 Sat Heb 8.6,8,11-13
Lk 11.14-20
Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain. **Jr 20.7-9**

5 SUN Jos 5.10-12
2 Co 5.17-21
Coming to his senses, the prodigal son said: I will leave this place and go to my Father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. **Lk 15.1-3,11-32**

6 Mon Jr 20.10-13
Heb 9.11-14
Jesus said: Happy are they who hear the word of God and obey it. **Lk 11.27-28**

7 Tue Heb 9.24-28
Lk 11.33-36
The Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue those who are wronged from the hands of their oppressors. **Jr 22.1-3**

8 Wed Jr 23.3-4
Lk 12.8-12
We have been made holy by Jesus Christ giving his life once and for all. **Heb 10.5-10**

9 Thu Jr 23.5-6
Heb 10.14-18
Jesus said: Be on your guard against every kind of greed; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. **Lk 12.13-21**

10 Fri Heb 10.22-25
Lk 12.22-31
The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. When you seek me, you shall find me, for you will seek me with all your heart. **Jr 29.11-14**

Meditating on the Word

11 Sat Jr 30.17-19a
Lk 12.32-34
Remember the first days when, after having received the light of faith, you stood your ground in the face of great suffering. All your belongings were seized, and you accepted this joyfully because you knew that you had better and lasting possessions. Heb 10.32-38a

12 SUN Ph 3.8-14
Jn 8.1-11
God says: Do not dwell upon the past, look, I am doing something new. **Is 43.16-21**

13 Mon Jr 31.3-6
Mt 22.34-40
By faith, Abraham answered God's call and set out for the land he was to inherit. And he set out without knowing where he was going. **Heb 11.1-3,8-10**

14 Tue Jr 31.11,13
Heb 11.13-16
Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. **Mt 24.42-47**

15 Wed Mt 25.34-40
Heb 12.1-3
The Lord says: I shall give in abundance to the weary and fill those whose strength has gone. **Jr 31.23,25**

16 Thu Jr 32.38-41
Heb 12.12-15a
Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **Mt 16.24-26**

17 Fri Jr 32.2-8
Heb 13.1-8
Jesus said: The Son of man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and turn him over to be mocked, scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised up again. **Mt 20.17-19**

18 Sat Jr 33.14-16
Jn 11.45-56
There is no permanent dwelling for us here, but we are looking for the one which is to come. **Heb 13.12-16,20-21**

19 SUN Zc 9.9-10
Lk 19.28-40
PALM SUNDAY
Being in every way like a human being, Christ Jesus was humbler yet, and became obedient to death, death on a cross. Therefore God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names. **Ph 2.6-11**

20 Mon Mt 26.30-35
Mt 26.47-56
Jesus prayed: My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Yet not as I will, but as you will. **Mt 26.36-46**

March

21 Tue Mt 27.11-26
Mt 27.27-37
Upon the cross, Jesus cried out in a loud voice: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Mt 27.39-50

22 Wed Jn 18.1-14
Jn 18.15-27
Jesus said to Pilate: My kingdom is not of this world. I came into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. **Jn 18.28-40**

23 Thu Lk 22.14-23
1 Co 11.23-26
Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, now loved them to the end. **Jn 13.1-15**

24 Fri Jn 19.1-16
Jn 19.17-22
GOOD FRIDAY
On the cross, Jesus said, "It is fulfilled", and bowing his head he gave up his spirit. **Jn 19.23-30**

25 Sat Mt 27.62-66
Jb 19.25-26
Christ was put to death in the body and raised to life in the Spirit. And in the Spirit he also went to announce the Gospel to those who once had refused to believe. **1 P 3.18-22**

26 SUN Col 3.1-4
Jn 20.19-23
EASTER DAY
When Jesus' disciple entered the empty tomb, he saw and believed. **Jn 20.1-9**

27 Mon Ac 2.22-28
1 Co 15.1-4
While two disciples were on their way to Emmaus, talking together about all that had happened, Jesus himself came up and walked with them. **Lk 24.13-27**

28 Tue Ac 2.37-41
Lk 24.28-34
Christ has been raised from the dead as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep. Just all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life. **1 Co 15.20-28**

29 Wed 1 Co 15.42-44
Lk 24.36-48
All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person. **Ac 2.42-47**

30 Thu Ac 3.1-10
Jn 21.4-14
Paul writes: As we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the heavenly one. **1 Co 15.44b-46,49**

31 Fri Ac 3.13-21
1 Co 15.53-57
A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." **Jn 21.15-19**

Meditating on the Word

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Sat Ps 78.1-5a
Ac 3.17-21

At the empty tomb, the women were met by two angels who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" **Lk 24.1-12**

2 SUN Ac 5.12-16
Rv 1.9-13,17-19

Jesus said to Thomas: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. **Jn 20.19-31**

3 Mon Ezk 1.26-2.5
Col 1.1-6

Jesus said: Unless a person is born from above, they cannot see the kingdom of God. **Jn 3.1-8**

4 Tue Ezk 3.10-12,15
Jn 3.13-17

God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **Col 1.13-14**

5 Wed Col 1.15-20
Jn 3.22,26-36

The Lord says: I will give an undivided heart to my people. I will put a new spirit in them. **Ezk 11.17-20**

6 Thu Jn 4.1-4
Col 1.24-27

The days are coming when every vision will be fulfilled and there will be no more futile visions or deceptive prophecies, since I, the Lord shall speak what I will. And what I say will come true without delay. **Ezk 12.21-25,28**

7 Fri Ezk 16.60-63
Jn 4.14-24

God has wanted to reveal to the nations the splendid riches of the mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **Col 1.24-27**

8 Sat Ezk 17.22-24
Mk 16.1-20

Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face at all times. Remember the wonders he has done. **Ps 105.1-7**

9 SUN Rv 5.11-14
Jn 21.1-19

God has raised Jesus from the dead and placed him at his right hand to be Leader and Saviour, and to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him. **Ac 5.27-32,40-41**

10 Mon Ezk 18.27-29,30-32
Jn 4.25-30

In his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. **1 P 1.1-5**

11 Tue Ezk 34.1-2,6,11
1 P 1.6-9

Jesus said: My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to complete his work. **Jn 4.31-38**

12 Wed 1 P 1.10-12
Jn 4.39-42

The Lord says: I will take care of my flock. I shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the strays, bandage the injured and strengthen the sick. I shall watch over the one that is healthy and strong. **Ezk 34.12-16**

13 Thu Ezk 34.23-27,30-31
Jn 4.46-54

Put all your hope in the grace brought to you by the revelation of Jesus Christ. **1 P 1.13-16**

14 Fri Jn 5.1-9a
Ezk 36.24-28

Love one another deeply, from the heart. **1 P 1.21-25**

15 Sat Ezk 36.33-36
Ps 105(104).8-11

Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. **Mk 16.9-20**

16 SUN Ac 13.14,43-52
Jn 10.27-30

John writes: I looked and saw a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, people and language. And they all fell down and worshipped God. **Rv 7.9,14-17**

17 Mon Ezk 37.1-5,7-10
1 P 2.4-6

Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and believes in the one who sent me has passed from death to life. **Jn 5.19-24**

18 Tue 1 P 2.9-10
Jn 5.25-29a

The Lord says: You will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and make you rise up from them. **Ezk 37.11-14**

19 Wed 1 P 3.19,21-25
Jn 5.30-37a

The Lord says: I shall make a covenant of peace with my people, and it will be an eternal covenant. I shall set my sanctuary among them for ever. **Ezk 37.23b-24,26-28**

20 Thu Ezk 39.27-29
1 P 1.13-16

Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone. **Jn 6.1-15**

April

21 Fri Ezk 43.4-7a
1 P 3.18-21

Jesus said: Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures for eternal life. **Jn 6.22-27**

22 Sat Ezk 47.1-12
Ps 106(105).1-5

The Risen Christ said to Mary of Magdala: Go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. **Jn 20.11-18**

23 SUN Ac 14.21-27
Jn 13.31-35

God will make his home among human beings; they will be his people and he will be their God. **Rv 21.1-5**

24 Mon 1 P 4.1-2,6
Jn 6.28-35

Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. He reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him. **Dn 2.20-22**

25 Tue 1 P 5.6-11
Mk 16.15-20

St MARK
Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. **Jn 6.37-40**

26 Wed Dn 3.8-18
Jn 6.41-47

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one speaking the very words of God; if anyone serves, let it be as one fulfilling God's service, so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ. **1 P 4.8-11**

27 Thu Dn 3.23-27
Jn 6.48-52,57-58

In so far as you share in the suffering of Christ, be glad. When his glory is revealed, you also will be filled with joy and gladness. **1 P 4.12-14**

28 Fri Dn 3.49-52
2 P 1.3-4

Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life." **Jn 6.60-69**

29 Sat Ps 106.43-45
Mt 28.1-10

O you who are faithful and humble in heart, bless the Lord! Sing his praises for ever! His love is everlasting. **Dn 3.57-89**

30 SUN Ac 15.1-2,22-29
Rv 21.10-14,22-23

Jesus said: Peace I leave you, my own peace I give you; a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. **Jn 14.23-29**

Johannine hours

Luke 9.57-62

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day (if possible, two days in the same week) take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

These three rapid dialogues with Christ make us understand, first of all, that following him means entering into dialogue with him. At certain moments in our life this dialogue stands out clearly. How do Christ's replies come to us?

Jesus invites whoever wants to follow him to remain with him. He has chosen to dwell with us, to the point that he no longer has a place to lay his head, no place set apart for his protection. Following him, therefore, means entering upon a life in which we are completely linked to his own passionate love for humanity.

In a society where a long traditional mourning was the custom, Jesus challenges a disciple to "let the dead bury their own dead". This impatience is not a rejection of filial affection, but a reminder of an urgent priority. Proclaiming the kingdom without delay means discerning, in every situation, the word of life God is addressing to us.

What could be more natural than to look backwards, to want to hold on to what we are leaving, to resist giving everything? And yet Jesus reacts even more strongly. To enter fully into the kingdom of God is possible. And it is not so much for a heroic act of renunciation that he asks, but a secret of his life that he offers to share with us: to receive everything from his Father in the present moment.

Looking at how Christ lived among us, how can I be available for other people with him? In what way is the proclaiming of the kingdom of God a word of life for me and for people around me? What have I already learnt to leave so as to be ready to welcome what God wants to give me?